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ABSTRACT

This study examined the attitudes toward secondary school of 631 adolescents attending 8th, 9th, and 10th grade in Parana, Argentina in 1998. Students completed a scale of 12 questions about the value of school and their teachers' capacity to teach and to establish good relationships with their students. Overall, most Argentinean students showed positive attitudes, similar to those reported in Sweden and the United States. Students tended to question their teachers rather than their schools. Dissatisfaction with their teachers grew between the first and second year in secondary school, though the value of attending school did not decrease over time. There were no gender differences in the total score for any of the three age groups, nor were their gender differences among those who attended private versus public schools. There were concurrent correlations between the negative attitude toward school and the presence of internalizing problems (low self-esteem, trait anxiety, and depression) and externalizing problems (antisocial behavior and substance use). Only a small percentage of students were interested in being remembered by their classmates as excellent students. (SM)

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ARGENTINIAN ADOLESCENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARD SECONDARY SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

In this work the attitude towards secondary school of a 631 ramdon cross-sectional sample of adolescents from 13 to 15 years old, all attending 8th, 9th and 10th grade of schools in Paraná (Argentina) in 1998, is reported. They completed a scale of twelve questions about the value of school and their teachers' capacity to teach and to establish good relationships with their students. Most Argentinian adolescents show a positive attitude similar to the one reported for countries like Sweden and the United States. They question their teachers rather than the usefulness of school. Dissatisfaction towards them grows between the first and second year in secondary school but the value of attending school does not decrease with age. As in the United States and Europe there are concurrent correlations between the negative attitude toward school and the presence of internalizing (low self esteem, trait anxiety, depression) and externalizing problems (antisocial behavior, substance use). The observations made by many parents and teachers concerning low appreciation of intellectual achievement are confirmed for this age group: only a small percentage are interested in being remembered as excellent students by their class-mates.

INTRODUCTION

In Argentina secondary school includes from 8th to 12th grade. Until 1998, this level was non-compulsory. For most students, starting high school means moving to a bigger school (400 to 1,000 students) where he/she has thirteen teachers instead of one as is the case at elementary school. For many authors, the whole educational system in Argentina is undergoing a deep crisis and the secondary level is described as the worst

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for its failure to meet desired goals. In this respect they are preoccupied about school performance (high percentage of students who repeat courses), academic achievement (each new cohort with poorer knowledge), and educational attainment (high percentage that does not finish high school). It is said that motivation to learn is minimum in many students and that an anti-intellectual attitude is increasing. In the media and in everyday conversations it is stated that adolescents have a negative attitude towards school and that it only interests them as a place where they can socialize with peers.

METHODOLOGY

A survey intended to investigate different aspects of the socio-emotional development and Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, Kovacs Children's Depression Inventory, Spielberger Trait Anxiety Inventory for Adolescents, Jacobsen Antisocial Behavior Scale (a subset of Olweus scale of antisocial behavior) and the Jakobsen Substance Use Scale were completed by the adolescents.

The Cronbach alpha for the 11 questions about school, whose alternatives were scored 0 for a positive attitude and 1 for a negative one, were .74, .76, and .78 for the three successive ages. The item "The majority of my professors demand too much", with which almost two thirds agreed, was excluded because it worsened the internal consistency of the scale. Univariated and bivariated statitistics were applied.

RESULTS

VALUE ATTACHED TO SCHOOL	13 YEARS OLD	14 YEARS OLD	15 YEARS OLD
School is a loss of time	4%	6%	5%
It doesn't provide me with useful know ledge for my future	5%	2%	6%
The only thing that interests me from school are friends	14%	18%	24%
I'm not interested in a high school certificate	7%	8%	7%
If I could, I wouldn't go to school	13%	15%	15%
They don't teach important things at school	2%	5%	9%
N	167	227	237

MOST OF MY TEACHERS...	13 YEARS OLD	14 YEARS OLD	15 YEARS OLD
Don't know their subject	13%	20%	23%
Explain badly	21%	25%	30%
Are unfair	27%	32%	36%
Don't like teaching	7%	12%	14%
Don't treat students well	13%	20%	11%
Demand too much	63%	67%	64%
N	167	227	237

ADOLESCENTS HAVE A MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD ATTENDING SCHOOL THAN TO THEIR TEACHERS.
THERE IS A MARKED INCREASE IN DISSATISFACTION TOWARD TEACHERS BETWEEN 13 AND 14, BUT THE VALUE OF ATTENDING SECONDARY SCHOOL DOES NOT DECREASE WITH AGE.

THERE ARE NEITHER GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE TOTAL SCORE IN ANY OF THE THREE AGES NOR AMONG THOSE WHO ATTEND PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS. THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN HELD BACK IN SCHOOLING (22% AT AGE 14 AND 38% AT AGE 15) AND THOSE WHO HAVE NOT, DO NOT DIFFER IN THIS RESPECT.

PEARSON´S CORRELATIONS BETWEEN ATTITUDE TOWARD SCHOOL AND INTERNALIZING AND EXTERNALIZING PROBLEMS

ATTITUDE TOWARD SCHOOL	13 YEARS OLD BOYS	13 YEARS OLD GIRLS	14 YEARS OLD BOYS	14 YEARS OLD GIRLS	15 YEARS OLD BOYS	15 YEARS OLD GIRLS
SELF ESTEEM	N.S	N.S	N.S	0.32 p=0.000	0.28 p=0.002	0.21 p=0.02
TRAIT ANXIETY	N.S	0.31 p=0.01	N.S	0.38 p=0.000	0.38 p=0.000	0.22 p=0.02
DEPRESSION	N.S	N.S	N.S	0.48 p=0.000	0.34 p=0.000	0.22 p=0.02
ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR	N.S	0.23 p=0.04	O.32 p=0.001	0.26 p=0.004	0.21 p=0.02	0.29 p=0.002
SUBSTANCE USE	0.24 p=0.02	0.23 p=0.05	0.25 p=0.01	0.27 p=0.002	N.S	0.24 p=0.01
N	92	75	103	124	118	119

IMPORTANCE OF BEING AN EXCELLENT STUDENT ACCORDING TO AGE AND GENDER

"I'D LIKE TO BE REMEMBERED AT SCHOO AS..."	13 YEARS OLD		14 YEARS OLD		15 YEARS OLD	
	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS
An excellent student	17%	4%	7%	5%	4%	4%
The best companion	30%	31%	42%	35%	36%	36%
The funniest	20%	33%	18%	27%	21%	25%
Just one more	17%	29%	18%	29%	30%	30%
An excellent sportsperson	14%	0%	12%	2%	7%	3%
The most sexually attractive	1%	3%	3%	2%	2%	2%
N	92	75	103	124	118	119

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the socioeconomic and cultural differences that exist between first world countries and Argentina, the percentage of adolescents who feel rejection towards secondary school and that have an attitude of low appreciation of intellectual achievements seems to be quite similar.